CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Beartooth Electric Underground Power Easement
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer/Fall 2020
Proponent:	Beartooth Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Location:	Section 36, Township 5 South, Range 18 East (Common Schools Trust)
County:	Carbon County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Beartooth Electric Cooperative is applying for a 20' wide easement on a parcel of Trust land in Carbon County for the installation of an underground electric distribution line. The parcel is described as the Section 36-T5S-R18E. The proposed 20' wide (3.02 acres) easement would generally be located along the east side of Butcher Creek Road (see Exhibit A).

This easement is proposed to replace an existing overhead electric distribution line on this section. Since the proposed action will change the location of the line, easement width, and add new spurs, it was determined that a regular easement was the most appropriate process to authorize the request. Beartooth Electric has been converting overhead distribution powerlines to underground in this general area for a number of years. According to Beartooth Electric, a local landowner is funding the effort to convert the overhead electric lines to underground.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. A Settlement of Damages form was obtained from the grazing lessee.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Montana Department of Environmental Quality – Storm Water Discharge Permit (Pending)
Carbon County Encroachment Permit (Pending)

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative: Issue a 20' wide easement to Beartooth Electric Cooperative for an underground electric distribution power line on Section 36, T5S, R18E in Carbon County.

No Action Alternative: Deny the request by Beartooth Electric Cooperative to issue a proposed 20' wide easement for an underground electric distribution power line on Section 36, T5S, R18E in Carbon County.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The route proposed in the easement is generally located along the east side of Butcher Creek Road, a county road. The underground electric power cable is proposed to be installed using a trenchless method. This method involves having the cable laid in as the plow pulls through the dirt. They will typically run a pre- rip pass down the path and if they think there is a rocky or difficult area they will make a second pre-rip pass before they lay the cable in at depth on the final pass. After this, they generally walk the Cat down each side of the rip to help flatten the ground. Based on the proposed action and relatively short disturbance time for cable installation, no significant adverse impacts to geology and soils are expected by implementing the proposed action.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:
Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

The proposed easement does not cross any surface water. However, it does cross several intermittent, unnamed drainages that flow west from the hills on the Trust Land towards Butcher Creek which is located west of the Trust Land. BMPs that will be followed should protect any nearby waterway from impacts during installation of the new underground electric cable. No significant adverse impacts to water quality, quantity or distribution are anticipated by implementing the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

There may be short-term isolated impacts from the equipment exhaust that is used to install the underground power cable and to remove the existing overhead powerline. No significant adverse impacts to air quality are expected by implementing the proposed action.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The underground electric power cable is proposed to be installed using a trenchless method. This method involves having the cable laid in as the plow pulls through the dirt. They will typically run a pre- rip pass down the path and if they think there is a rocky or difficult area they will make a second pre-rip pass before they lay the cable in at depth on the final pass. After this, they generally walk the Cat down each side of the rip to help flatten the ground. The area disturbed by the trenching activity and from vehicle travel could have short term impacts on vegetation. The easement document will also require Beartooth Electric to control any noxious weeds introduced by its activities and reclaim any disturbed areas. No significant long-term adverse impacts to vegetative cover, quantity or quality are expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

A variety of big game (antelope, deer, elk and mountain lions), small mammals, raptors and songbirds may traverse the subject property. The proposed project activities could temporarily disrupt wildlife movement and patterns. Due to the relatively short project duration and nature, no significant long term adverse impacts to terrestrial, avian and aquatic life and habitats are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicated the following four species of concern found for this parcel were the: Clark's Nutcracker, Bobolink, Grizzly Bear and Great Blue Heron. None of the species were observed on the parcel, just in the general area. This section is not located within Greater Sage Grouse General or Core Habitat.

Due to the nature of the proposed action, the installation of underground power cable, it is not expected to have a significant long-term effect on any of the species identified on or around this parcel. The surface disturbance will be temporary and generally located parallel and adjacent to an existing county road.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

Additionally, during a site visit on 25 November 2019 by Area Planner Jeff Bollman, a visual inspection was performed, especially on areas outside of previously disturbed areas, and no cultural or paleontological resources were identified.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The proposed action would result in the installation of an underground power line cable adjacent and generally parallel to an existing county road. In addition, it will also result in the removal of the existing overhead power line that is currently located on the parcel. Once the easement area is rehabbed from the installation disturbance, the only indication that there is an underground power line would be from any above-ground warning markers. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to aesthetics is expected as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No significant adverse impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are expected to occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other known studies or future actions planned for this Trust land parcel.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No significant adverse impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The location of the easement does not traverse any crop lands. No significant adverse impacts to industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed action will have no significant impact on the quantity and distribution of employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will have no adverse impact on tax revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

The implementation of the proposed alternative will not generate any additional demands on governmental services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Implementation of the proposed alternative will not conflict with any locally adopted plans.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The subject parcel does have legal public access via a county road (Butcher Creek Road). The underground power optic cable installation is expected to occur in the Summer/Fall of 2020 (weather dependent). Impacts due to installation should be minimal as the easement generally runs parallel to the existing county road and installation will be of a relatively short duration. The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to have a long-term adverse impact on recreational use of these Trust land parcels.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No significant adverse impacts to density and distribution of population and housing would occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposed alternative.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed alternative will not have a significant adverse impact on cultural uniqueness or diversity.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

The Common Schools Trust Permanent Fund will benefit by getting a one-time fee of $3,625 from Beartooth Electric Cooperative for the purchase of the easements on this Trust parcel.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Jeff Bollman, AICP	**Date:**	3 April 2020
	Title:	Area Planner, Southern Land Office		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a permanent 20' easement be granted to Beartooth Electric Cooperative for the purpose of installing underground power line cable on the following Trust land parcel in Carbon County: Section 36, Township 5 South, Range 18 East.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The potential for significant adverse impacts to the Trust lands listed above are minimal due to the nature of the proposed action which would entail the issuing of an easement and installation of underground power line cable. The easement is located adjacent to and parallel to Butcher Creek Road, an existing county road. There are no natural features that could produce adverse impacts or species of concern occupying the parcels that are expected to be impacted by implementing the proposed action.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Jeff Hermanns
	Title:	Area Forester, Southern Land Office
Signature: /s/ Jeff Hermanns		**Date**: 4/3/2020

Exhibit A – Proposed Easement location on Section 36-5S-18E